



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ARIZONA RESIDENT ARRESTED FOR ATTEMPTING TO SMUGGLE \$3 MILLION WORTH OF STOLEN WEDDING DRESSES INTO MEXICO

Dresses were stolen in 2006 from Breast Cancer charity

TUCSON, Ariz.— Alejandro Parra-Ruiz, 32, a citizen of Mexico and a legal permanent U.S. resident residing in Laveen, Ariz., was arrested on November 1, 2007 in Laveen by agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and was charged with attempting to smuggle \$3,000,000 worth of wedding dresses from the U.S. into Mexico in April 2007. During his initial appearance before a U.S. magistrate Judge in Tucson on November 2, 2007, Parra-Ruiz was released on a \$15,000 personal appearance bond and pleaded not guilty. Parra-Ruiz returned to U.S. District Court on November 6, 2007 and waived his preliminary hearing set for the same day.

On April 5, 2007, at the Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales, Ariz., U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents discovered a trailer containing nearly \$3,000,000 worth of wedding gowns which had been reported stolen by Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation on November 5, 2006. The wedding dresses had been donated to the foundation for sale at auction and the proceeds were to be used by the Portland, Oregon based foundation. The wedding dresses were returned to the foundation by CBP shortly after they were recovered.

The stolen items were discovered after Ivan Mesa-Esparza, a commercial driver allegedly hired by Parra-Ruiz, attempted to re-enter the U.S. with the trailer because the Mexican officials refused him entry into Mexico. Mesa-Esparza claimed that Parra-Ruiz hired him to transport the items from Phoenix into Mexico and denied any knowledge that the items were stolen. During a law enforcement monitored phone call with Mesa-Esparza, Parra-Ruiz denied any knowledge that the wedding dresses were stolen and claimed he had purchased them at a local swap meet but did not get a receipt. Parra-Ruiz then instructed Mesa-Esparza to lie to CBP officials about where Mesa-Esparza picked up the items in an apparent attempt to conceal information.

A conviction for Smuggling Goods from the United States carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, the sentencing judge will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. A criminal complaint is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation preceding the complaint was conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Nogales and Phoenix Offices of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The prosecution is being handled by Angela M. Martinez, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: 07-8540M
RELEASE NUMBER: 2007-232(Parra-Ruiz)

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